

Casey at the Bat

Ernest Lawrence Thayer



Baseball Players Practicing, 1875, Thomas Eakins Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

▲ **Critical Viewing** Compare and contrast the stance and attitude of the batter in this painting with Casey's stance and attitude. [Compare and Contrast]

It looked extremely rocky for the Mudville nine that day;
The score stood two to four, with but an inning left to play.
So, when Cooney died at second, and Burrows did the same,
A pallor wreathed the features of the patrons of the game.

pallor (pal' ə) *n.* paleness

wreathed (rēthd) *v.* curled around

5 A straggling few got up to go, leaving there the rest,
With that hope which springs eternal within the human breast.
For they thought: "If only Casey would get a whack at that,"
They'd put even money now, with Casey at the bat.

10 But Flynn preceded Casey, and likewise so did Blake,
And the former was a pudd'n, and the latter was a fake.
So on that stricken multitude a deathlike silence sat;
For there seemed but little chance of Casey's getting to the bat.

But Flynn let drive a "single," to the wonderment of all.
And the much-despised Blakey "tore the cover off the ball."
15 And when the dust had lifted, and they saw what had occurred,
There was Blakey safe at second, and Flynn a-huggin' third.

Then from the gladdened multitude went up a joyous yell—
It rumbled in the mountaintops, it rattled in the dell;¹
It struck upon the hillside and rebounded on the flat;
20 For Casey, mighty Casey, was advancing to the bat.

There was ease in Casey's manner as he stepped into his place,
There was pride in Casey's bearing and a smile on Casey's face;
And when responding to the cheers he lightly doffed² his hat,
No stranger in the crowd could doubt 'twas Casey at the bat.

25 Ten thousand eyes were on him as he rubbed his hands with dirt,
Five thousand tongues applauded when he wiped them on his shirt;
Then when the writhing pitcher ground the ball into his hip,
Defiance glanced in Casey's eye, a sneer curled Casey's lip.

writhing (rīth' in) *v.* twisting; turning

And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
30 And Casey stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped;
"That ain't my style," said Casey. "Strike one," the umpire said.

From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
Like the beating of the storm waves on the stern and distant shore.
35 "Kill him! kill the umpire!" shouted someone on the stand;
And it's likely they'd have killed him had not Casey raised his hand.

Reading Check

What happens when the first ball is thrown to Casey?

1. **dell** (del) *n.* small, secluded valley.
2. **doffed** (dāft) *v.* lifted.

With a smile of Christian charity great Casey's visage³ shone;
 He stilled the rising tumult, he made the game go on;
 He signaled to the pitcher, and once more the spheroid flew;
 40 But Casey still ignored it, and the umpire said, "Strike two."

"Fraud!" cried the maddened thousands, and the echo answered
 "Fraud!"

But one scornful look from Casey and the audience was awed;
 They saw his face grow stern and cold, they saw his muscles strain,
 And they knew that Casey wouldn't let the ball go by again.

45 The sneer is gone from Casey's lips, his teeth are clenched in hate.
 He pounds with cruel vengeance his bat upon the plate:
 And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now he lets it go,
 And now the air is shattered by the force of Casey's blow.

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright,
 50 The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light:
 And somewhere men are laughing, and somewhere children shout,
 But there is no joy in Mudville: Mighty Casey has struck out.

3. **visage** (viz' ij) *n.* face.

tumult (tōō' mult) *n.* noisy commotion

Reading Strategy

Summarizing State the main points and details of these two stanzas briefly and in your own words.

Review and Assess

Thinking About the Selection

1. **Respond:** Did you expect the poem to end the way it did? Why or why not?
2. (a) **Recall:** What happens in the first two stanzas? (b) **Analyze Causes and Effects:** How does the first part of the poem make you want to keep reading?
3. (a) **Recall:** Describe Casey, citing details of his appearance and actions. (b) **Infer:** What type of player would you say Casey is? Why?
4. (a) **Recall:** How is Casey described before the last pitch? (b) **Draw Conclusions:** How might Casey's attitude have affected his game?
5. (a) **Recall:** What is the outcome of Casey's turn at bat? (b) **Speculate:** Based on what you know about Casey, what do you think was his reaction? Why?
6. (a) **Analyze:** Why do you think this poem—written more than a century ago—has remained one of the most popular sports poems to this day? (b) **Evaluate:** Do you think the poem deserves this status? Why or why not?

Ernest Lawrence Thayer

(1863–1940)

It is not surprising that "Casey at the Bat" reads like a sports story in verse. The poet, Ernest Lawrence Thayer, spent many years working as a newspaper reporter. Thayer began his reporting career working on *The Lampoon*, Harvard University's humor magazine. He later worked at newspapers in New York and California.

"Casey at the Bat" first appeared in the *San Francisco Examiner* on June 3, 1888, under Thayer's pen name, Phin. The poem became such a favorite that in 1953 it inspired an operetta called *The Mighty Casey*.